



BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

**FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
March, 2011**

**TESTIMONY BY LIZ RYAN, PRESIDENT and CEO OF
THE CAMPAIGN FOR YOUTH JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**Supporting:
HB 6638: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE**

**Opposing:
RSB 1164: AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF PROVISIONS TO RAISE
THE AGE OF JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION FOR YOUTH SEVENTEEN YEARS
OF AGE.**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee, on behalf of the Campaign for Youth Justice, a national organization dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system, I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to RSB 1164, which would delay implementation of "raise the age" legislation for 17 year olds. I and the Campaign are strongly in favor of HB 6638, making technical changes to ensure smooth implementation of "raise the age" legislation for 17 year olds on January 1, 2012. After reviewing the latest research, Connecticut lawmakers made the right decision by passing "raise the age" legislation originally in 2007 and implementing that change for 16 year olds in 2010.

I applaud Connecticut lawmakers in taking these steps to improve the state's juvenile justice system. You assessed the latest research and concluded that youth under the age of 18 should not be automatically prosecuted in the adult criminal court. It is important that CT has made good on this promise. The rest of the nation is watching and Connecticut has been lauded in newspapers and media outlets across the country. Many states are following Connecticut's lead and looking to you for your continued leadership on this.

In 2005, you began moving toward this policy change because of a tragic suicide. On July 17th, David Burgos took his life at the Manson Youth Institute, an adult prison. In 2007, another young person committed suicide in the same adult facility. Can CT afford to lose more youth this way?

The new law prevents young people from receiving unnecessary life-long consequences. Youth tried as adults face severe and harmful life-long consequences. Youth can be placed in adult facilities pre- and post-trial, sentenced to serve time in adult prisons or be placed on adult probation with few to no rehabilitative services. Youth are also subject to the same sentencing guidelines as adults and may receive mandatory minimum sentences or life without parole.

When youth leave jail or prison, are on probation, or have completed their adult sentence, these youth carry the stigma of an adult criminal conviction. They may have difficulty finding a job or getting a college degree to help them turn their lives around. Access to a driver's license may be severely restricted, and in some states, youth may never be able to vote or hold public office.

The consequences of an adult conviction aren't minor; they are serious, long-term, life threatening and in some cases, such as David Burgos, these cases are deadly.

The new law is in step with the rest of the nation. Many other states have already begun to re-examine and reverse these punitive laws. Earlier this month, we released a new report, *State Trends: Legislative Changes from 2005 to 2010 Removing Youth from the Adult Criminal Justice System*, documenting state law changes enacted in Connecticut and more than a dozen other states during the last 5 years.

Now is not the time to back away from the promise you made to your children and to your communities. I urge the General Assembly to reject RSB 1164 and not reverse or delay the implementation of this important legislation. It's the right thing to do. Not only for the safety of our communities and families, but for the future of our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.